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ABSTRACT

Despite the value placed on traditional culture in Old Order Amish society, these communities have experienced change recently. These changes include: use of legal means to regulate behavior, acceptance of technical medical services such as heart transplants, and diminished importance of farm work to the economy of the community. However, the Old Order Amish constitute a bastion of stability within the larger society. This stability is expressed in the use of draft horses instead of farm machinery, horse and buggy instead of automobile, oil lamp instead of electric lamp, home-produced food instead of commercially processed food, and in families of eight to ten children instead of the usual one to three. In addition, marriage is permanent because divorce is not recognized, and a literal interpretation of the Bible is applied to all areas of life. This means that when civil laws run counter to sacred belief, such as the mandate for Social Security taxes and inspection for enforcement of building codes, civil disobedience is practiced. (BZ)

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THE OLD ORDER AMISH

STABILITY IN CULTURE

BY

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1986

THE OLD ORDER AMISH--STABILITY IN CULTURE

There are numerous changes taking place among the Old Order Amish. These changes include an increased emphasis being placed on legal means of regulating behavior. Thus, instead of the deacon and the bishop of an Amish congregation working out disagreements among members, there are also outsiders who influence conduct. Norman Kaufman[1] and his parents were awarded a settlement of nearly $1 million when a pickup truck hit the horse and buggy the former was driving. Suing for damages in a court of law is very unusual for the Old Order Amish.

A second change in Amish culture emphasizes an increased rise of technical medical services. Although, they have purchased needed assistance for decades from medical doctors, having a heart transplant is indeed unusual for many but for an Old Order Amish member it is indeed rare. Dennis Mast, age 18 from Nappanee, Indiana, was the third person in Indiana to receive a human heart transplant. Dennis is able to do farm work, such as picking corn and desires to work in a trailer factory.[2]

A third change in Amish society stresses the kinds of work performed by its members. T. W. Foster[3] found in Geauga County, Ohio that more Amish men were involved in other types of work as compared to working right on the locally owned farm. Thus, Foster found that 37

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1. Des Moines (Iowa) Register, "Amish man gets damages for buggy-crash injuries," page 1, April 3, 1985. The accident happened near Bloomfield, Iowa.

2. "Mennonite Weekly Review", December 22, 1983, page 11.

3. T.W. Foster. "An Ohio Amish Settlement," Ohio Journal of Science, Volume 84 (3) 74-81, 1984.

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percent worked in traditional nonfarming kinds of work, such as doing carpenter work and bricklaying for others. Thirty-two percent worked in nontraditional forms of work, such as being employed in cheese and rubber factories in Middlefield, Ohio. Thirty-One percent of Old Order Amish men were farmers. The Amish, no longer, can be considered a farm centered population. A practical people seeks accepted work, as is necessary, in society.

Amidst the above named changes, the Old Order Amish remain a relatively stable society.

Stability within the Framework of Change

The Old Order Amish emphasize definite strands of stability in culture. Birth control methods, in general, tend to be taboo. Large families of 8 to 10 children are looked upon as being a blessing from God. Many Amish live on farms and thus can raise their own garden crops for human consumption. These crops can be eaten raw or prepared in various ways for human consumption during the summer months. For winter, much canned food of different fruits and vegetables is eaten. Farm crops grown on the farm, such as corn, is fed to cattle and hogs. An ample supply of meat for family consumption is raised and produced on the local farm. Cash income, such as from selling corn, soybeans, and wheat, is important to buy cloth, coffee, tea, sugar, kerosene for fuel, and wood burning stoves, among other items. With home produced food, homemade clothes, and locally built buggies for transportation, costs are minimized much in raising eight to ten children in a family. Birth control methods are viewed as being sinful. The tradition and custom of wanting large families is still with the Old Order Amish.

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The following news item[4] indicates the value placed upon a large family:

Medford, Wis.--An Amishman who died here recently apparently set a world record for number of direct descendants and living descendants, according to research by George R. Smith, associate editor of The Budget of Sugarcreek, Ohio.

At his death, Adam Bontrager, 96, had 11 children, 115 grandchildren, 529 great-grandchildren, for a total of 675 living descendants. In addition eight grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren of the same family are deceased, making a total of 707 direct descendants.

Mrs. John D. Schmucker of the community verified that all of the descendants are blood relatives; no adopted children or stepchildren are included in the total.

According to the current edition of the Guiness Book of World Records, the largest family groups ever recorded were those of Mrs. Johanna Booyson of South Africa, who was estimated to have 600 living descendants in 1968, and Wilson Kettle of Newfoundland, who left 582 living descendants when he died in 1963 at the age of 102.

THE RESEARCH refers only to monogamous societies; in polygamous cultures there can by many times the number of descendants.

Smith has recorded many other large Amish families over the years. The previous greatest total of living descendants was 555 for Bishop Moses Borkholder of Nappanee, Ind., who died in 1933 at the age of 94. He had 17 children by two wives. Eleven of the children survived him, along with 138 grandchildren, 388 great-grandchildren; and 18 great-great-grandchildren.

In 1978 Jonas J. Schmucker of Geauga County, Ohio, died at the age of 90 leaving 526 living descendants--14 children, 120 grandchildren, 372 great-grandchildren and 20 great-great-grandchildren. However, of this number several of the great-grandchildren were adopted.

SMITH NOTES that another Amish family group may be gaining on the record-makers. A year ago Lydia Byler of Staunton, Va., celebrated her 96th birthday. At that time she had eight living children along with 60 grandchildren, 295 great-grandchildren and 124 great-great-grand-children, for a total of 486 living descendants.

A second stabilizing trend in Amish society is the possession of a strong conscience and convictions. When the laws of a state violate their sacred beliefs, civil disobedience is involved. Members of a congregation may also move to a different state where laws exist or are made to permit freedom of conscience.

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4. The Mennonite Weekly Review, May 17, 1984, page 7.

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The following news item[5] indicates personal strong convictions held by the Old Order Amish.

The Ohio Supreme Court will be asked to review the conviction of two Wayne County, Ohio, Amishmen for violating the County building code, according to attorneys for the two men. On May 31, the Ninth District Court of Appeals overruled an appeal filed on behalf of Eli L. Hershberger and Daniel E. Yoder, who failed to obtain building permits to construct additions at their farms. The defendants have said that being required to obtain permits and allow inspection of their homes is against their religious beliefs. The appeals court upheld the convictions, but reduced Yoder's fine from $600 to $300. Hershberger's $600 fine was left intact.

To many in society, the above named violations would not be made due to fines and fees levied. However, Old Order Amish possess a unique culture and they adhere strongly to traditions and Biblically interpreted beliefs. They may move to a different state if local requirements of the law require orange reflector triangles on the back of Amish buggies as a safety device. The movement to another state is made if religious beliefs are violated and the local state does not make exceptions in laws, according to Old Order Amish beliefs.

The Old Order Amish have also been opposed to paying social security taxes. They do not want governmental aid with retirement moneys at any age, nor do the Amish desire disability payments in any form. "Social security" for the Old Order comes from helping each other in times of natural disasters (which destroy farm buildings), and ill health whereby others come to do the needed farm work (in case of the husband) or the housework (in case of the housewife).

New legislation is passed continuously which affects the Amish. Social security legislation is no exception. The following appeared in the Mennonite Weekly Review:[6]

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[5] Mennonite Weekly Review, May 17, 1984, page 2.

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New Social security legislation which took effect Jan 1 continues to pose a problem for many Amish and Mennonite private schools, according to William McGrath, Beachy Amish minister from Minerva, Ohio. The specific issue is the new requirement that Christian day school teachers participate in Social Security--something which several conservative groups oppose. According to McGrath, several schools paid their teachers the whole school year's salary before Dec. 31 to avoid tax. Others "will be forced to pay the tax starting Jan 1, 1984 or you will be regarded as an illegal tax resister," he notes. Legislation to exempt religious institutions from the Social Security requirements is pending in Congress.

Thus, customs and tradition remain strong in opposition to the payment of money on earned wages and salaries to support the Social Security program.

Hostettler[7] wrote the following pertaining to Amish convictions and receiving insurance payments from an impersonal source:

Grandfather is respected as a patriarch, and his social status increases as he reaches retirement age. He would be insulted by old-age pension checks. To retire he simply moves into the grossdawdy (grandfather) house, and the younger generation takes over. He shuns commercial forms of insurance, for in his judgment he already has the best kind of insurance. He has no premiums to pay. If a barn burns down, the neighbors are there to help him buld a new one. If he becomes ill, they do his work. Should he die suddenly, they make arrangements to have the farm operations continue.

Amish mutual aid provides "social security" for its members from birth to death. Security comes from friendly personal relations, from father and mother, brother and sister, uncle and aunt, and church members, and not from impersonal and remote sources, such as investment bonds, state security, or welfare boards.

For the past number of years Amish leaders have appeared in Washington to seek freedom from federal aid. They do not object to paying taxes, but they do object to receiving government aid or having their children and grandchildren fall heir to such a temptation. Before the House Ways and Means Committee they said, "Old-age survivors insurance is abridging and infringing to our religious freedom. Our faith has always been sufficient to meet the needs as they come." They believe, as the Bible says, "But if any provide not...for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (I Timothy 5:8).

Recently the government seized cows and horses from Ohio Amish farms and sold them at public auction because the Amishmen refused to pay the Old Age and Survivors Insurance System self-employment tax.

6Mennonite Weekly Review, January 12, 1984, page 2.

7John A. Hostetler, Amish Life. Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herold Press, 1959, pages 14-16.

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The Amish, who are otherwise law-abiding, God-fearing, and tax-paying citizens, in this instance say it is against their religion. To pay the tax is to admit that the government has a responsibility for aged Amish members, and to admit this is to deny their own responsibility, one of their main religious principles. Amish parents raise their children to respect and to assume responsibility for their elders in old age.

A closely knit family as well as quality, personal relations with other members of the congregation is highly important to the Old Order Amish. Getting along well with others in society is also prized highly. In times of disaster, such as, hurricanes and cyclones, among other natural disasters, Amish assist outsiders to rebuild and regain what was possessed previously.

Maintaining Desired Traditions

The Old Order Amish have definite ways of maintaining selected customs in an era of rapid changes in society. Without the use of electricity in the home and farm setting, there are no automatic clothes washers and dryers, no automatic dishwashers, no radios, and no television sets. The use of radios and television, in particular, have greatly modified beliefs and values in society. A rather common set of beliefs and values comes from viewing television programs. The soap operas, situation comedies and talk shows, among others, present content completely foreign to Amish thinking and value systems.

Amish culture emphasizes

1. Hard work and thrift. The use of horse drawn farm machinery, for example, does not emphasize doing work the easiest way possible. Rather in plowing with horses, cutting grain with a binder, shocking bundles of grain by hand, and pitching grain bundles into a thrashing machine with a pitch fork, "in the sweat of thy brow" becomes a way of life.

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2. a simpler, less complex way of life. To keep up with the Joneses is not a goal. Modern automobiles, three car garages, a large yard with a huge new house in suburbia is not a goal of any Amish family. Strong family ties and the world of work are significant and salient to Old Order Amish culture.

3. religious beliefs, as interpreted by the Amish, being central to their way of life. To justify each deed and act, the Bible is quoted. In a conversation with Roy Yutzy, parocial school teacher in Pleasant Hill School, near Bloomfield, Iowa, the writer stated, "I admire the Old Order Amish for their hard work, honesty, and traditions, It is difficult to work with horse drawn farm equipment in farming and using horses and buggies for transportation." Mr. Yutzy replied, "We Amish do not want to be known for working hard and using horses in farm work. We only want to be known as Christians."

4. stability in marriages. Amish congregations do not recognize divorce among their married couples. They marry other Old Order Amish only, in securing a husband or wife. In general, birth control methods are not practiced among married couples. Large numbers of children in a family are looked upon as being a gift of God. Children mature early to help in farm work, such as helping to take care of livestock, working in the garden in summer, taking care of younger brothers and sisters, and doing chores in the house.

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In Summary

The Old Order Amish attempt to maintain a stable nonchanging culture amidst a changing society. Thus, changes such as the following are occurring in selected situations.

1. increased use of legal services rather than relying completely upon informal means of controlling human behavior.

2. greater utilization of medical services compared to earlier times. A heart transplant represents an ultimate in terms of purchasing medical services.

3. less emphasis placed upon farming as a means of earning a living.

Stability in Amish culture is stressed in

1. the use of draft horses in farming endeavors.

2. horse and buggy means of transportation.

3. nonuse of electricity in Amish farm enterprises, as well as in the home setting.

4. literal interpretation of the Bible to guide Amish ways of life and living.

5. traditional permanent marriages with no divorce recognized.

Selected References

Des Moines (Iowa) Register, "Amish man gets damages for buggy-crash injuries," page 1, April 3, 1985. The accident happened near Bloomfield, Iowa.

Foster, T.W. "An Ohio Amish Settlement," Ohio Jornal of Science, Volume 84 (3) 74-81, 1984.

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